

She ne used no suche knakkes smale.

WHAT wherfor that I telle my tale?
Right on this same, as I have seyde,
Was hoolly al my love leyde;
for certes, she was, that swete wyf,
My suffisaunce, my lust, my tyf,
Myn hap, myn hele, and al my blisse,
My worldes welfare and my lisse,
And I hirs hooly, everydel.

Your Lord, quod I, I trowe yow wel!
Hardely, your love was wel beset,
I not how ye mighte have do bet.

Bet? ne no wight so wel! quod he.

I trowe hit, sir, quod I, parde!

Nay, leve hit wel! **S**ir, so do I;

I leve you wel, that trewely

Yow thoughte, that she was the beste,

And to beholde the alderfaireste,

Who so had lokyd with your eyen.

WITH myn? nay, alle that hir seyen

Seyde, and sworn hit was so.

And though they ne hadde, I wolde tho

have loved best my lady fre,

Thogh I had had al the beautee

That ever had Alcipyades,

And al the strengthe of Ercules,

And therto had the worthinesse

Of Alisaundre, and al the richesse

That ever was in Babiloyne,

In Cartage, or in Macedoyne,

Or in Rome, or in Ninive;

And therto also hardy be

As was Ector, so have I joye,

That Achilles slow at Troye,

And therfor was he slayn also

In a temple, for bothe two

Were slayn, he and Antilogus,

And so seyth Dares frigijs,

for love of hir Polixena,

Or ben as wys as Minerva,

I wolde ever, withoute drede,

Have loved hir, for I moste nede!

Nede! nay, I gabbe now,

Noght Nede, and I wol telle how,

for of good wille myn herte hit wolde,

And eek to love hir I was holde

As for the fairest and the beste.

SHE was as good, so have I reste,

As ever was Penelope of Grece,

Or as the noble wyf Lucrece,

That was the beste, he telleth thus,

The Romain Cytus Livius,

She was as good, and nothing lyke,

Thogh hir stories be autentyke;

Algate she was as trewe as she.

WHAT wherfor that I telle thee

Whan I first my lady sey?

I was right yong, the sooth to sey,

And ful gret need I hadde to lerne;

Whan my herte wolde yerne

To love, it was a greet emprise.

But as my wit coude best suffyse,

After my yonge childly wit,

Withoute drede, I besette hit

To love hir in my beste wyse,

To do hir worship and servyse

That I tho coude, by my trouthe,

Withoute feynyn outhir slouth;

for wonder fayn I wolde hir see.

So mochel hit amended me,

That, whan I saw hir first amorne,

I was warished of al my sorwe

Of al day after, til hit were eve;

Me thoghte nothing mighte me greve,

Were my sorwes never so smerte.

And yit she sit so in myn herte,

That, by my trouthe, I nolde noght,

for al this worlde, out of my thought

Leve my lady; no, trewly!

WELL, by my trouthe, sir, quod I,

Me thinketh ye have such a chaunce

As shrift withoute repentaunce.

REPENTANCE! nay fy, quod he;

Shulde I now repente me

To love? nay, certes, than were I wel

Wers than was Achitofel,

Or Anthenor, so have I joye,

The traytour that betrayyd Troye,

Or the false Genelon,

He that purchased the treson

Of Rowland and of Oliver.

Nay, whyl I am alyve here

I nil foryete hir nevermo.

WELL, goode sir, quod I right tho,

Ye han wel told me herbefore,

It is no need reherse hit more

How ye sawe hir first, and where;

But wolde ye telle me the manere,

To hir which was your firste speche,

Therof I wolde yow besече,

And how she knewe first your thought,

Whether ye loved hir or noght,

And telleth me eek what ye have lore;

I herde yow telle herbefore.

NE, seyde he, thou nost what thou menest;

I have lost more than thou wenest.

What los is that, sir? quod I tho;

Nil she not love yow? is hit so?

Or have ye oght ydoon amis,

That she hath left yow? is hit this?

for Goddes love, tel me al.

BEFORE God, quod he, and I shal.

I saye right as I have seyde,

On hir was al my love leyde;

And yet she niste hit never a del

Noght longe tyme, leve hit wel.

for be right siker, I durste noght

for al this worlde telle hir my thought,

Ne I wolde have wratthed hir, trewly.

for wostow why? she was lady

Of the body; she had the herte,

And who hath that, may not asterte.

WAT, for to kepe me fro ydelnesse,

Trewly I did my besinesse

To make songes, as I best coude,

And ofte tyme I song hem loude;

And made songes a gret del,

Althogh I coude not make so wel

Songes, ne knowe the art al,

As coude Lamekes sone Tubal,

That fond out first the art of songe;

for, as his brothers hamers ronge

Upon his anvelt up and down,

Therof he took the firste soun;

But Grekes seyn, Pictagoras,

That he the firste finder was

Of the art; Aurora telleth so,

But therof no fors, of hem two.

Al gates songes thus I made

Of my feling, myn herte to glade;

And lo! this was the altherfirste,

I not wher than hit were the werste.

WORD, hit maketh myn herte light,

Whan I thinke on that swete wight

That is so semely on to see;

And wisse to God hit might so be,

That she wolde holde me for hir knight,

My lady, that is so fair and bright!

WELL have I told thee, sooth to saye,

My firste song. Upon a daye

I bethoghte me what wo

And sorwe that I suffred tho

for hir, and yet she wiste hit noght,

Ne telle hir durste I nat my thought.

Alas! thoghte I, I can no need;

And, but I telle hir, I nam but deed;

And if I telle hir, to seye sooth,

I am adred she wol be wrooth;

Alas! what shal I thanne do?

In this debat I was so wo,

Me thoghte myn herte braste atweyn!

So atte laste, soth to seyn,

I me bethoghte that nature

Ne formed never in creature

So moche beaute, trewely,

And bounte, withouten mercy.

In hope of that, my tale I tolde

With sorwe, as that I never sholde,

for nede; and, maugree my heed,

I moste have told hir or be deed.

I not wel how that I began,

ful evel rehersen hit I can;

And eek, as helpe me God withal,

I trowe hit was in the dismal,

That was the ten woundes of Egipte;

for many a word I over-skippe

In my tale, for pure fere

Lest my wordes mis-set were.

With sorweful herte, and woundes dede,

Softe and quaking for pure drede

And shame, and stinting in my tale

for ferde, and myn hewe al pale,

ful ofte I wex bothe pale and reed;

Bowing to hir, I heng the heed;

I durste nat ones loke hir on,

for wit, manere, and al was gon.

I seyde Mercy! and no more;

Hit nas no game, hit sat me sore.

SO atte laste, sooth to seyn,

Whan that myn herte was come ageyn,

To telle shortly al my speche,

With hool herte I gan hir besече

That she wolde be my lady swete;

And swor, and gan hir hertely hete

Ever to be stedfast and trewe,

And love hir alwey freshly newe,

And never other lady have,

And al hir worship for to save

As I best coude; I swor hir this:

for yowes is al that ever ther is

for evermore, myn herte swete!

And never false yow, but I mete,

I nil, as wis God helpe me so!

AND whan I had my tale ydo,

God wot, she accounted nat a stree

Of al my tale, so thoghte me.

To telle shortly as hit is,

Trewly hir answer, hit was this;

I can not now wel counterfete

Hir wordes, but this was the grette

Of hir answer; she sayde, Nay

Alouterly. Alas! that day

The sorwe I suffred, and the wo!

That trewly Cassandra, that so

Bewayled the destruccioun

Of Troye and of Ilioun,

Had never swich sorwe as I tho.

I durste no more say therto

for pure fere, but stal away;

And thus I lived ful many a day:

That trewely, I hadde no need

ferther than my beddes heed

Never a day to seche sorwe;

I fond hit redy every morwe,

for why I loved hir in no gere.

SO hit befel, another yere,

I thoughte ones I wolde fonde

To do hir knowe and understonde

My wo; and she wel understood

That I ne wilned thing but good,

And worship, and to kepe hir name

Over al thing, and drede hir shame,

And was so besy hir to serve;

And pite were I shulde sterve,

Sith that I wilned noon harm, ywis.

So whan my lady knew al this,

My lady yaf me al hoolly

The noble yift of hir mercy,

Saving hir worship, by al weyes;

Dredles, I mene noon other weyes.

And therwith she yaf me a ring;

I trowe hit was the firste thing;

But if myn herte was ywaxe

Glad, that is no need to axe!

As helpe me God, I was as blyve,

Reysed, as fro dethe to lyve,

Of alle happes the alderbeste,

The gladdest and the moste at reste.

for trewely, that swete wight,

Whan I had wrong and she the right,

She wolde alwey so goodely